SAVE OUR VANISHING WETLANDS

Wetlands are disappearing and YOU can prevent further loss. These valuable habitats need your help if we are to maintain the waterfowl, salmon, trout, beaver, herons, and other wildlife they support and water quality they enhance.

Wetland Values:

- Wetlands (Marsh, Swamp, Bog, Lake and Pond Margins) are highly productive habitats. Marsh plants, open water, and adjacent or scattered trees within the wetland all support a diverse assemblage of wildlife. Ducks nest here, herons feed, otters roam through, while beavers often create wetlands. Salmon and trout benefit from wetland food sources and the filter/storage functions of the marsh.

- Wetlands filter sediment and trap pollutants which would otherwise enter streams, lakes and marine waters.

- Water storage and recharge are two vital wetland functions. Runoff and rain water soak into a wetland like a sponge and as water accumulates, it slowly enters groundwater and stream systems to maintain water flow. Flood waters are also held in check by the wetland sponge.

- Wetlands support several rare and endangered or threatened species including bald eagles. In addition, several species are restricted to wetlands, especially aquatic plants and those species adapted to certain kinds of wetland. For example, bogs provide essential habitat for several plants such as the carnivorous sundew.

- Educational value of wetlands cannot be underestimated. Many children first learn about the natural world catching frogs or watching dragonflies emerge from the marsh. Scientists often use wetlands as natural laboratories and naturalists lead field trips through wetlands to watch birds and discuss food chains, predator-prey interactions, and competition for space amongst animals. We owe many discoveries and explanations of functions of the natural world to observation and study conducted in wetlands.

- Recreation in wetlands is significant. Recreational opportunities derived from wetland species, which move elsewhere during some stage in their life, are tremendous. Salmon, trout, waterfowl, herons, and many other recreational species are dependent on wetlands.

- Commercial harvest of salmon is linked to the health of wetlands which offer life support, especially to juvenile fish. Intertidal wetlands (salt marsh, eelgrass, kelp and algae beds) support many marine species of considerable commercial value ranging from flounder to dungeness crab.

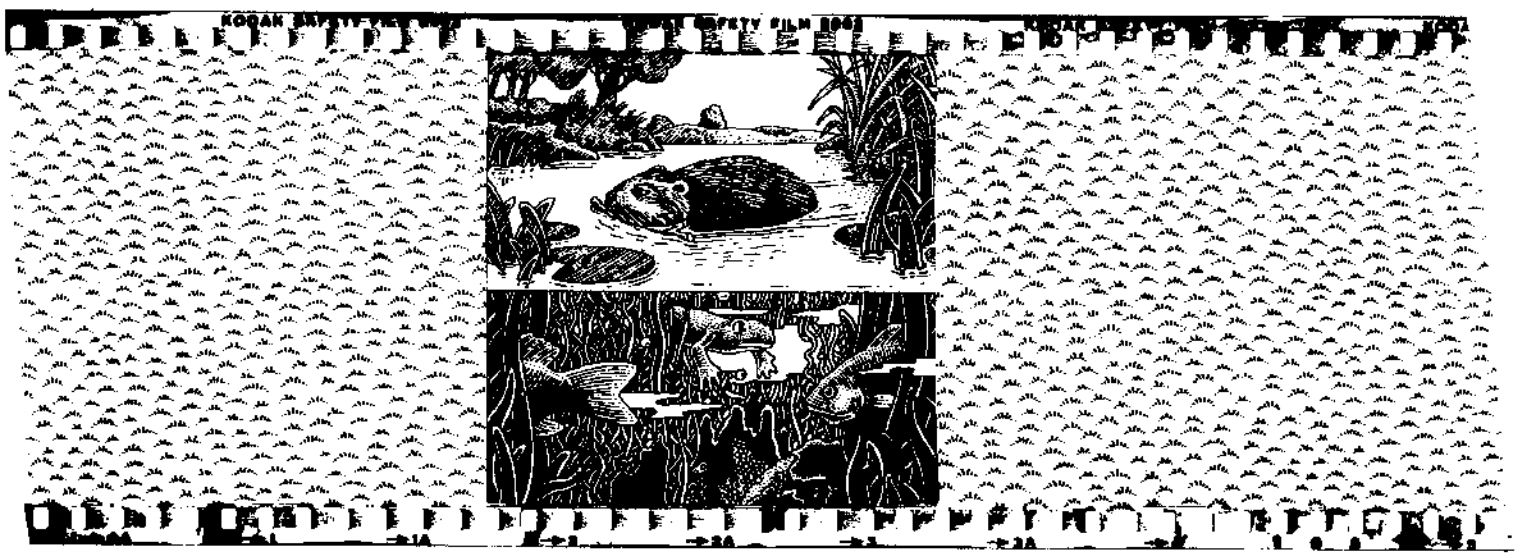
- Esthetic values of wetlands are often recognized but not considered in development projects. Wetlands serve as a gentle transition zone between terrestrial and aquatic habitat. This effect is pleasing to the eye and is a major reason why wetlands perform their other valuable functions: Wetlands are ecotones, supporting species unique to themselves and sustaining life on land and in the water--offering a critical link in the northwest environment.

Wetland Losses:

- Nationally, more than 50 million acres of wetland have been lost due to filling, draining, and other land use practices. This is more than one-third of the original extent of U. S. wetlands.

- Locally, wetland loss proceeds at an alarming rate. Estuarine wetland loss is especially pronounced; many wetlands have been totally eliminated and in others, only vestiges remain. A striking example is 0.03 square km Kellogg Island which is all that remains of the 8.5 sq. km of intertidal wetlands that once formed the mouth of the Duwamish River and is now the Port of Seattle.

- Smaller wetlands, the freshwater marshes and bogs of inland Washington, are being cleared, drained, filled and altered due to construction, logging, excavation and other activities. Many of these wetlands are small and may seem insignificant, but they are often the only wetland in the vicinity and each is an integral part of the local environment.



Wetland Protection:

What can you do to protect wetlands?

- If you see a wetland being filled or altered in any way, ask if permits have been issued to allow the work. If not, contact county officials and the State Game or Fisheries office near you. Other agencies responsible for wetland protection are the Department of Ecology and U. S. Army Corps of Engineers.

- Restore altered wetlands. Corrective measures include planting riparian vegetation and restoring drainage patterns.

- If you own wetlands, ensure protection and maintain a buffer of natural vegetation. The buffer will enhance wetland functions and wildlife value.

- If you know of a wetland in your area, find out who owns it. Can it become part of a park or open space? Also, make sure local area, county and state agencies know about the site and include it as part of sensitive area planning.

- Support the designation of wetlands as sensitive areas. Wetland inventory and assessment is taking place in King, Kitsap, Snohomish and Pierce Counties. Contact county and state officials to voice your support of these efforts and to ensure that your area is included in sensitive area planning.

- Support the efforts of the Audubon Society and other groups involved in sensitive area planning and wetland protection.

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